Cristiane S. Duarte, PhD, MPH, Columbia University-NYSPI

Maternal depression and relative weight in early childhood: Examining key mechanisms and racial/ethnic disparities

This paper focuses on the association between maternal depression and childhood relative weight in early life. We report on the analysis of a sample (N=8,150) of the 9- and 24 month waves of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Birth Cohort (ECLS-B). Maternal depression was assessed using a 12-item version of the CES-D, administered to the mother when the child was approximately 9 months of age. Child relative weight at 24 months was represented by weight-for-stature z-scores, based on CDC growth curves. The test of the association between child relative weight and levels of maternal depressive symptoms was only marginally significant, with children of severely depressed mothers having higher levels of weight-for-stature z-scores [mean(SE)=0.69(0.10)] compared to mothers who had none or minimal depressive symptoms [mean(SE)=0.53(0.04)] (p=0.112). Adjustment for maternal depressive symptoms seems to have an impact on statistically significant differences in child relative weight at 24 months. Specifically, when children of Asian or Hispanic race/ethnicity were compared to White children. In conclusion, results did not support the hypothesis that child relative weight at 24 months is related to the levels of maternal depressive symptoms when the child was 9 months. Maternal depression seems to contribute to differences in relative weight among certain racial/ethnic groups.